



Expanding **minds** and Opportunities

Leveraging

the Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success

This article is an excerpt from the groundbreaking book, ***Expanding Minds and Opportunities: Leveraging the Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success***. This landmark compendium, edited by Terry K. Peterson, PhD, is composed of nearly 70 research studies, reports, essays, and commentaries by more than 100 researchers, educators, community leaders, policy makers, and practitioners.

Collectively, these writings boldly state that there is now a solid base of research and best practices clearly showing that quality afterschool and summer learning programs—including 21st Century Community Learning Centers—make a positive difference for students, families, schools, and communities.

Together, the collection of articles demonstrates the power of quality expanded learning opportunities to:

- **promote student success and college and career readiness;**
- **build youth assets such as character, resilience, and wellness;**
- **foster partnerships that maximize resources and build community ties; and**
- **engage families in their children's learning in meaningful ways.**

For information on how to order the full book, download sections and individual articles, or explore the topic areas, visit www.expandinglearning.org/expandingminds.

About the Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project

The Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project is a 50-state initiative harnessing the power of networks and leaders to help schools and communities leverage the time beyond school to accelerate student achievement. A partnership of funders led by the C.S. Mott Foundation support the Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project. More information about the book and the project, as well as additional resources, can be found at www.expandinglearning.org.

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More Than Just Another “To-Do” on the List: The Benefits of Strong School, Principal, and Afterschool/ Community Relationships

The research is clear: *Principals matter* in the outcomes of their schools (Young, 2009). Next to having a great teacher in the classroom, strong principal leadership is the second most important factor in improving student outcomes. Moreover, research shows that high quality afterschool and summer learning programs also play an important role in helping students achieve academically, socially, emotionally, and physically (Vollmer, 2010). Therefore, it seems logical to suppose that collaboration between principals and afterschool and summer learning leaders would occur quite naturally; however, they often do not do so, despite knowing that they should.

While sharing the leadership responsibility for the success of children and youth in school, after school, and during the summertime poses many challenges, there are increasing examples of how to make this collaboration not only work well, but yield very positive results. The benefits of strong principal and afterschool/community relationships are numerous and should not be regarded as just creating more tasks or work to handle. Overcoming these challenges requires a paradigm shift about the distinctive, yet complementary purposes of school, afterschool, and summer learning. This paradigm shift incorporates rethinking and redefining staff roles and responsibilities; community engagement; and how, when, and where children and youth learn and flourish.

That is why the boards of directors of the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and the National Afterschool Association (NAA) joined together in 2009 to challenge our members to “build a new day for learning,” aimed at achieving innovative reform within schools and through quality afterschool and summer learning programs. This does not mean just adding more responsibility to the jobs of principals and afterschool leaders. Rather, it means pursuing a clear path to achieving

cooperatively designed learning and developmental goals for students based on enriched and experiential learning. When principals and afterschool leaders share leadership responsibilities, they can create seamless connections between school and afterschool and between school and summer learning programs resulting in higher levels of achievement, a well-rounded education, and fulfillment for all children and youth. Further, they can engage and involve parents and families across the continuum, from school to afterschool and then to their homes, leading to greater satisfaction with and support for public schools.

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NAESP's *Leading Afterschool Learning Communities* (2006) emphasizes the importance of strong school/afterschool partnerships in the context of laying out a set of research-based standards for what principals should know and be able to do to ensure highly effective afterschool and summer learning programs and initiatives. High-quality afterschool and summer learning programs offer a unique opportunity to provide students with enrichment and support to augment and reinforce the learning and cognitive growth that is achieved during the school day and year. Such programs incorporate an expansive vision of learning and a strong commitment to collaborate with schools to manage resources.

Setting standards for “bridging” school, afterschool, and summer learning for the benefit of students is an important start, but it takes a significant commitment of resources to achieve the desired results. Federally funded programs for afterschool and summer programs offer a real opportunity for principals and afterschool and summer leaders from the community to come together to provide academic enrichment opportunities during nonschool hours for children, particularly for students who attend high-poverty and low-performing schools. As a result, many outstanding practices and initiatives have emerged in communities across the nation in terms of rethinking the time and place of the learning day to improve student achievement. It is clear that strong partnerships focused on creating a shared vision, collaborative planning,

and fostering a common culture emphasizing high achievement are keys to successful school/afterschool partnerships.

What follows is a set of key insights, principles, and practices for partnership and collaboration that will reinforce the efforts of schools, afterschool, and summer learning programs to enhance learning and achievement.

Relationship building is the cornerstone to achieving positive school/afterschool outcomes for children and youth.

Across the nation there are scores of model programs featuring successful partnerships between principals and afterschool and summer learning program directors. These programs provide students with positive and safe environments, empower learning and academic success, and encourage an ongoing collaboration among peers, adults, and the greater community that puts the needs of the students first.

Scott Langham, principal of Bay Minette Elementary School in Baldwin County, Alabama, works collaboratively with Cherry Penn, president of the Alabama Community Education Association, who is also the After School Childcare Program supervisor and 21st Century Community Learning Centers grants program manager for Baldwin County. “The Project Tiger Paws has provided a quality afterschool program and plays a vital role in providing opportunities for our students to realize learning can be fun,” Langham said in an article for the Press-Register Community News last year. “The 21st Century Community Learning Centers program provides outstanding enrichment activities for the students at Bay Minette Elementary School, which encourages the students to think of themselves as capable learners” (Press Register, 2010).

Shared vision, planning, and culture are essential to effective school/afterschool/summer learning efforts.

Increasingly, principals and afterschool leaders are being expected to do more with less. Some principals may think of afterschool as an additional task they must manage; more realistically, afterschool affords solutions to their many challenges in meeting the learning, social, and emotional needs of students. When principals and afterschool directors provide a common vision, encourage collaborative planning, and foster a professional culture of mutual support for effective program implementation across all institutional settings, they help every student have a better chance for success.

IS 318 middle school in Brooklyn, New York, makes afterschool part of the school culture, a key factor in their success as a school. Principal Fortunato Rubino, Assistant Principal John Galvin, and afterschool leaders work with teachers and community-based organizations to offer students academic help as well as up to 40 different enrichment activities, including ceramics, art, band, guitar, fitness, homework help, reading and math programs, photography, cheerleading, volleyball, basketball, yoga, academic contests, computer arts, theater/drama, chorus, orchestra, bicycling, cross-country, football, soccer, baseball, track, wrestling, softball, field hockey, martial arts, debate, yearbook, newspaper, student government, technology, and more (Jacobs, 2011).

Effective planning solidifies school/afterschool/summer learning collaboration.

Effective planning is essential for the success of school, afterschool, and summer learning initiatives. It must involve the principal and the afterschool and/or summer learning program site leaders and cannot be delegated to others. Each must know how and be able to connect and form a strong professional relationship and foster similar relationships among their respective professional staffs. Increasingly, for example, principals are instituting collaborative intervention-planning practices that involve their staffs and afterschool personnel in data analysis and the development of coordinated team approaches to helping students achieve.

School/community partnerships improve academics, attendance, and more for students at Holmes Junior High School in Cedar Falls, Iowa. Principal David Welter credits their afterschool program ECHOES (Every Child Has the Opportunity to Excel and Succeed), which offers a

wide variety of programs and builds many positive adult-child relationships. According to Welter, the data that has been collected since their program was initiated in the 2002–03 school year show that collaboration between the Cedar Falls Community School District and the Cedar Falls community, along with innovative and engaging learning opportunities tied to academics and a caring and energetic staff, has produced positive results for their students. Tracking of students involved in the ECHOES program showed significant improvement in attendance, fewer behavioral referrals, and better grades (Welter, 2010).

Effective afterschool and summer learning programs expand learning opportunities.

They do not replicate classroom lessons. Principals and afterschool leaders should meet briefly each week to coordinate their communications and plan the alignment of learning activities with the strong caution that afterschool and summer learning programs and activities not lead to a replication of what happens during regular school hours or the regular school year and thus simply become “more school” after school.

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Rather, both principals and afterschool leaders should want afterschool and summer learning to be the time and place in which young learners are free to explore, develop, and be enriched in a variety of differently structured activities and environments. Many successful programs are designed to offer activities, experiences, and relationships that promote students’ social and emotional development, often reducing the risk of delinquent behavior and further enhancing their academic performance and motivation to continue to learn. For some learners, the standard school day or school year does not allow adequate time to learn what is necessary for success in the modern workforce and world. High quality afterschool and summer learning programs provide more time and opportunity for those who need it most, taking into account and accommodating the different ways students learn.

Dayton’s Bluff Elementary was once one of the worst performing schools in Saint Paul, Minnesota. The school has deliberately worked over the past 10 years to collaborate across sectors, improve professional development, provide innovative approaches to learning, and truly let research drive decision making. The Achievement Plus program has been critical to the success of Dayton’s Bluff. Established as a partnership between Saint Paul Public Schools and the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, Achievement Plus works to improve student achievement in Saint Paul’s urban schools, while also creating an urban education model and demonstration site. With the help of Achievement Plus, Principal Andrew Collins and the teachers have been able to collaborate across sectors—bringing together teachers, parents, and community leaders—to improve student engagement and parental involvement, develop afterschool opportunities, and provide students with a wide range of opportunities that foster safe and supportive learning environments. From a recreational center attached to the school to programs that offer health care services and information on housing and literacy, Dayton’s Bluff offers students and their families increased opportunities for success (“St. Paul Elementary School,” 2010).

Conclusion

NAESP and NAA will continue to encourage acceptance of the value of strong school/afterschool/summer learning program partnerships. Our organizations also see 21st Century Community Learning Centers as a real opportunity to build and “test drive” these partnerships, so current proposals to water down or eliminate the partnership requirements and afterschool provisions in the program guidelines makes little sense. We therefore see the need to expand the federal appropriations for afterschool programs rather than cut them back; moreover, we should avoid loading up these initiatives with extraneous requirements that can undermine their original and fundamental purposes. At the same time, we will support key initiatives that improve and strengthen best practices in the field, including

- *pre-service training for principals that defines, details, and showcases evidence-based practices of effective, high quality afterschool programming;*
- *joint leadership training for principals and afterschool leaders;*
- *development of learning communities where school/afterschool/community representatives share the school as the hub of activities; and*
- *investments in school and afterschool training opportunities and staff professional development so that children and youth in both settings will be served by qualified personnel.*

Student learning is no longer the sole province of schools. Therefore, it is imperative that principals and afterschool program site leaders, along with their faculty and staff colleagues, strive to build strong ties of mutual support for enriching the experiences of children and youth in schools and afterschool and summer learning programs in every learning community throughout our nation. As the nation’s economy improves, we also welcome state and local efforts to develop policies and make financial investments that invite and encourage expanded learning opportunities after school and during the summertime through strong school-community partnerships.

For some learners, the standard school day or school year does not allow adequate time to learn what is necessary for success in the modern workforce and world. High quality afterschool and summer learning programs provide more time and opportunity for those who need it most, taking into account and accommodating the different ways students learn.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Gail Connelly is the executive director of the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and president of the NAESP Foundation, located in Alexandria, Virginia. NAESP leads advocacy and support efforts on behalf of its 23,000-member network of elementary and middle school principals. Connelly's 35-year career in education and association management ranges from early childhood to adulthood with specialized knowledge of K–8 educational administration.

Paul G. Young has served in leadership roles with the National Association of Elementary School Principals (president, 2002–03), and the National AfterSchool Association (president & CEO, 2010–12). In addition, his experience as a principal and an afterschool program director has provided him special, practical insights into the needs of principals and afterschool professionals as they work to create expanded learning opportunities for children and youth. He is passionate about helping principals and afterschool professionals align school and afterschool and equipping young educators with the principles needed to become outstanding leaders and contributors to the profession.

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